

Not Your Ordinary School Textbooks

"You'll never believe what happened at the book festival on Sunday! Betty and I were working the table and this boy came by. He took the textbook and said, 'I know this book.' I asked him how he knew it, and he said because it is in his classroom. He told us that he 'loved the book.' I asked him what he liked about the book and he said, 'It's not ordinary history, it's interesting history.'"

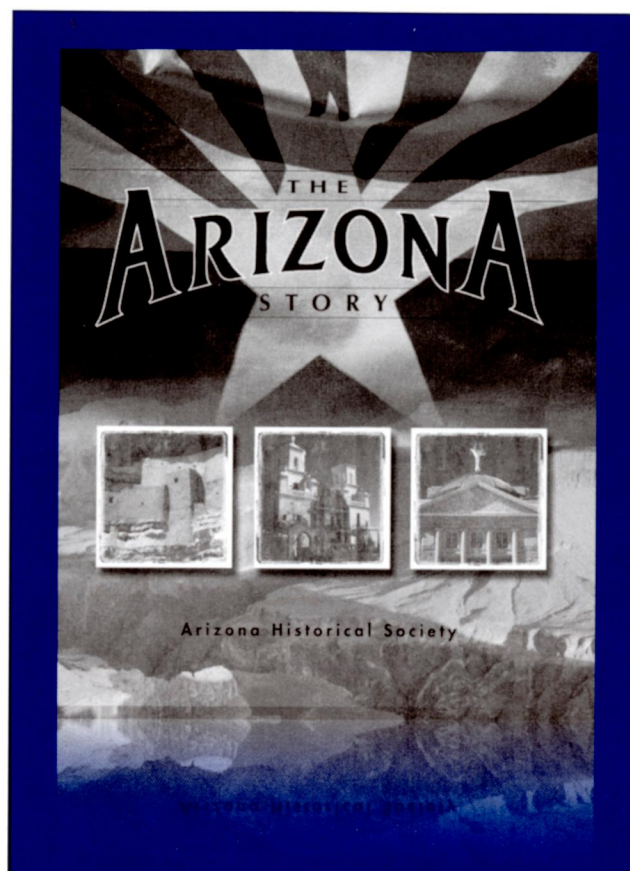
—KYLE MCKOY, Director
Education & Outreach Division
ARIZONA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

In 2009, the AASLH Awards Review Committee received four separate school textbook nominations from Arizona, Wisconsin, Montana, and North Dakota. After thorough review, the Committee concurred that each deserved Leadership in History Awards from AASLH. While the projects varied greatly in scale, approach, budget, timeline for development, and audience, all four provide interesting models for consideration in the field. And none can be accused of being simply ordinary history.

Arizona

From 2006 through 2008, the Arizona Historical Society (AHS) developed *The Arizona Story* for the benefit of the state's fourth-grade students. Created in response to the special emphasis the Arizona Department of Education Standards for Social Studies placed on analyzing and assessing primary resources, the AHS textbook provides ample opportunities for students to discover Arizona history through the use of the society's collections. The resulting text tells the state's story with illustrations from AHS's photographic, archival, and object collections.

The text's publisher, Gibbs Smith, bore all advertisement, promotion, and printing costs. While generally organized chronologically, and presenting Arizona's history from 10,000 B.C.E. to the present, the textbook also contains chapters on Arizona's land (combining the geol-



ogy, geography, and ecology of the state), U.S. and Arizona civic and governmental history, and Arizona economics.

The book is particularly notable in that it integrates and supports multiple intelligence learning strategies into the classroom and combines multiple intelligence learning techniques with museum collections, state, and national history. As Syd Golston, president elect of the National Council for the Social Studies, shared, "I find [*The Arizona Story*] of high interest for young readers, yet challenging enough for teachers to use as they move the elementary curriculum toward real and detailed study of history. In fact, the opening chapter comprises a wonderful introduction for young people to the concept and practice of history as a discipline."

Thus far, nineteen of the twenty Arizona school districts where AHS has presented the text, as well as numerous private and charter schools, have adopted the book for use. Districts from the

Navajo Nation to the Pima-Maricopa Indian Reservation, and from rural and urban districts alike, have chosen this text over the three competitive textbooks for use in their schools. Curriculum materials include the textbook, a wraparound teacher edition, a teacher resource guide, audio books in both Spanish and English, transparencies, and a website that houses multimedia resources.

The Arizona Story truly stood out among other textbooks offered to Arizona schools. Korin Forbes, Elementary Social Studies Specialist for Mesa Public Schools, noted, "Mesa Public Schools (MPS) adopted this program in May 2007, after a nine-month adoption process in-

volving teachers, staff, and community members. Some of the unique features that made this program stand out above the alternatives were the ease of use of the teacher's edition, the high interest level of student materials, and the accurate portrayal of the history of Arizona.... Many MPS students are first and second generation Hispanics and do not have a solid grasp of their heritage and the importance it has in our nation's history. *The Arizona Story* gives them reasons to value the uniqueness of where they live, learn more about their heritage and be proud of it."

And, perhaps most importantly, the students enjoy using the book themselves. "I have to admit, the Arizona book rocks!" writes a fourth-grade student from Mesa Public Schools, "the book is full of all kinds of interesting facts. My favorites were where it talks about the Hohokam and how they used to live and what the sports were like. I appreciate the book we have."

Wisconsin

Our State, Our Story



Wisconsin Historical Society Press

Wisconsin

The Wisconsin Historical Society Press also created a fourth grade history textbook. *Wisconsin: Our State, Our Story* focuses heavily on individual stories as a way to tell broader stories in Wisconsin history. In addition, the society intentionally designed materials with access in mind for different learning styles and reading abilities and to address both social studies and language arts standards.

The authors, Bobbie Malone, Wisconsin Historical Society Office of School Services, and independent contractor Kori Oberle, actively utilized resources from the Historical Society's own collections, as well as from organizations across the state including local historical societies, museums, and Indian nations to tell these stories. Malone describes each section as a "mini-museum with primary sources, both artifacts and images, which support the stories throughout the textbook."

The text is broken into ten themes and eras as defined by the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction Standards. In addition, the authors organized the textbook around a U.S. Department of Education Teaching American History Grant inquiry-based approach called "Thinking Like

a Historian" which encourages students to actively ask and utilize questions as they explore, think, and learn about the state's history. This approach was a success, as Sue Hamblin, Social Studies Resource Teacher from the Madison Metro School District, noted. "One of the reasons for our overwhelming excitement in using this textbook is that the students and teachers are 'doing history,' not just memorizing facts.... This

framework asks good essential questions, displays many artifacts, maps, and images that provide evidence for students to analyze and draw conclusions. The activity guide that accompanies the textbook provides ways for students to demonstrate their understanding of the evidence." Prior to publication, teachers and fourth-grade students from twenty rural and urban classrooms were heavily involved as editors, recommending both design and content changes to make the materials as user-friendly as possible. The project's \$740,000 budget included development of the textbook, teacher edition of the textbook, student activity guide, online support materials, DVD teacher introduction to the materials, and in-service training for teachers.

Wisconsin: Our State, Our Story had an immediate impact. Beth Ratway of the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction reported, "The textbook changes how history is taught in Wisconsin elementary schools. It stresses critical thinking over memorization, is written around real Wisconsin stories and artifacts, not a 'generic' format followed by national textbook publishers, and reflects Wisconsin's diversity: geographically, ethnically."

Currently seventy-six of the state's

school districts are utilizing the resources, including the major metropolitan areas of Madison and Milwaukee. In 2008, the project received the Milwaukee County Historical Society Award of Merit.

Because of the overwhelmingly positive response from both students and teachers, Malone anticipates that additional districts will utilize the text in the coming years. And when they do, Wisconsin Historical Society staff will gladly travel to those schools to provide in-service training and link these engaging classroom materials to the local and regional organizations where students and their families can go to learn more.

Montana

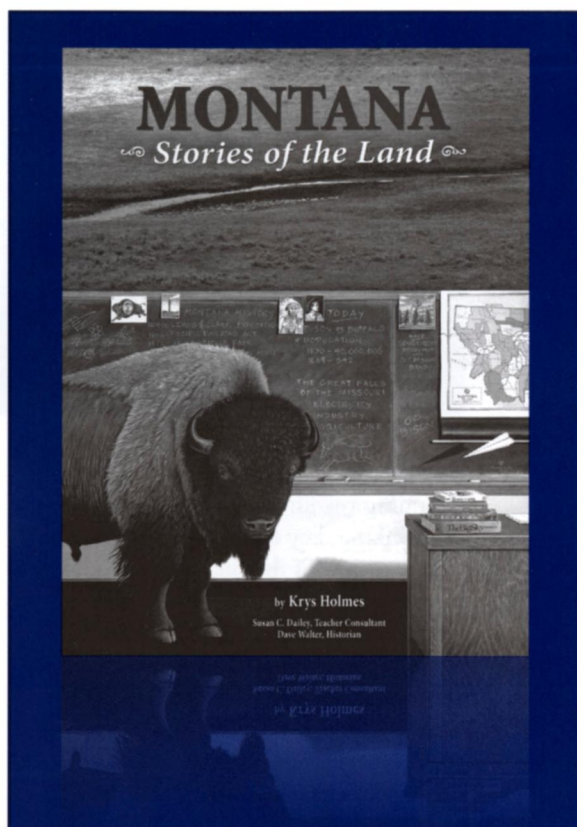
Montana: Stories of the Land was a project that took nearly a decade to complete. Montana Historical Society (MHS) research historian Dave Walter initiated the project in 1999 in response to the frequent calls to MHS from middle and high school history teachers who were required to teach Montana history without the aid of an age-appropriate textbook. Though Walter passed away in 2006, MHS continued the project and, in 2008, the book debuted to widespread praise and interest.

As MHS explained in its nomination narrative, "The Montana Historical Society Research Center used to receive panicked calls each year from teachers who had been assigned a class on Montana history. These overworked teachers were desperate for an accurate, comprehensive, and engaging textbook. We could help them pull together some materials, but a Montana history textbook aimed at middle-school students had never been produced, because with just

12,000 seventh graders, Montana's population is too small to interest a recognized commercial publisher."

The Montana Historical Society Press completed the project in-house with the assistance of corporate, foundation, and individual donor support. The book pulls deeply from the society's trove of artifacts, paintings, maps, and more than 400 historical photographs from the collections.

Geared toward middle school students, specifically seventh graders, the book is designed so that all of Montana's students will be able to recognize their own history in the book. In particular, the authors integrated the history of Montana's native peoples throughout. While state law requires teaching the history of Montana's Indian tribes, this text, for the first time, includes tribal perspectives on Montana's history and recognizes that tribes' histories did not begin in 1804 or end in 1877. The book also profiles the rural history of the



Montana Historical Society

10,000 textbooks and could not fill the high demand, the society made the decision to post the entire book for free on the Web. All told, an estimated 25,000 students will ultimately benefit from the book.

Montana: Stories of the Land clearly filled a gap in the teaching of Montana history. As Stevensville High School history teacher Jeff Waniata noted in a December 2009 issue of *American Teacher*, "There has been an empty void in teaching Montana history [and] the historical society has filled the void."

Another teacher shared, "Along with the online resources, worksheet, and tests, it is very easy to teach and very easy to adapt to the wide range of levels I teach. There is so much information that I am able to require more depth from the older students....

This is the first time in my thirty-five years of teaching that I have had the luxury of a real, nice textbook devoted to Montana history, complete with the fabulous online guide."

North Dakota

While the Arizona, Wisconsin, and Montana materials were developed over a period of years, the North Dakota text was developed in seven months. In 2007 North Dakota legislated that all high schools offer a North Dakota history class. At the time, no textbook existed, textbook publishers were disinterested in the project, and the legislature allocated zero funds to develop resource materials for the class. Later that fall, with limited funding in hand, the North Dakota Center for Distance Education (NDCDE) approached the State Historical Society of North Dakota about developing a textbook with featured content from the Society's journal, *North Dakota History*.

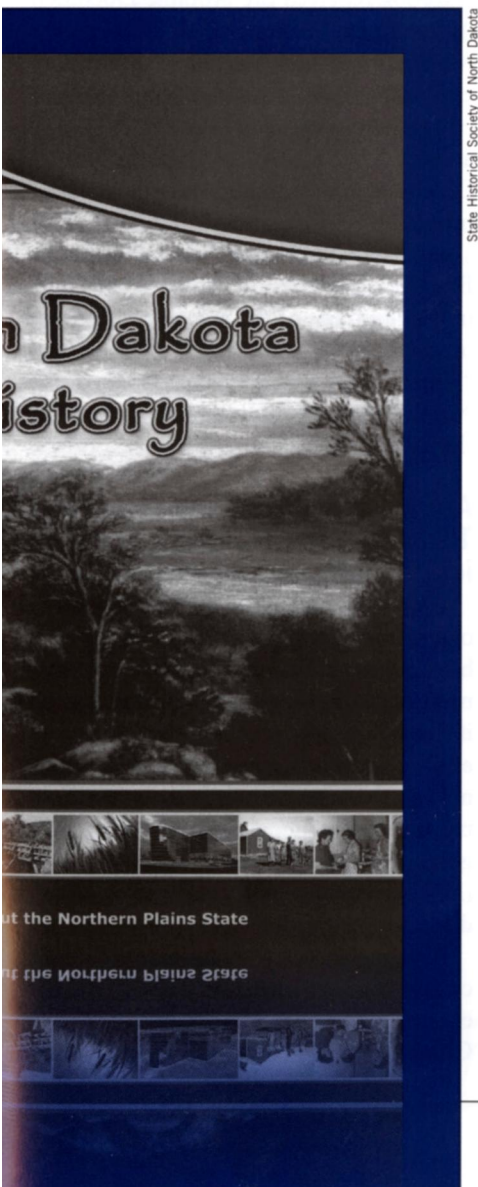
Building off of the eighth grade North Dakota textbook that provides a solid summary of the state's history, editors reviewed a century of *North Dakota History* looking for articles that could provide more in-depth coverage. Authors selected

state, something often lacking in traditional textbooks.

Montana: Stories of the Land provides a comprehensive history of Montana from pre-contact to the present, organized chronologically into four large eras and twenty-two sub-periods. Materials include the textbook, an online teacher's guide, and its companion website.

The website includes tests, answer keys, end-of-chapter questions, and extension activities that teachers can access for free. The materials are found on a password-protected part of the site, but all educators are granted access upon verification that they are indeed teachers. Most interestingly, teachers and students can access the entire book on the Web through low-resolution PDFs of every chapter and map.

MHS provided 5,000 copies of the textbook free of charge to 144 schools in fifty-four of Montana's fifty-six counties. Since demand far outweighed supply, public schools, middle school teachers, and schools that taught a full year of Montana history were given priority. MHS sold approximately 2,000 more books to schools and individuals interested in Montana history. Because the society received requests for more than



State Historical Society of North Dakota

articles that had scholarly value, featured a broad range of topics of interest to high school students, and utilized a mix of scholarly and primary sources. The society accomplished this goal, as Bethany Andreason of the Minot State University History Department reported. "By using articles that address individual topics in depth and detail, the textbook avoids a common criticism—that textbooks are bland, boring, and do not cover topics sufficiently to develop true comprehension. Because students are apt to be unfamiliar with this type of written history, it begins with an introduction that informs them about the writing of history."

The completed text, *North Dakota History*, is organized chronologically in seven time periods with a summary for each section. When articles were not available, the team filled gaps with online primary sources. The final product includes a textbook, teacher resource guide on CD, and online supplemental materials.

A notable feature of the teacher resource guide is an overview describing how to use primary sources in the classroom. This section includes an explanation of why and how to use them, as well

as tools for evaluating their effectiveness including reading comprehension, critical thinking, key terms, and activities.

In a review of the book, Erik Holland, formerly Program Associate at the Minnesota Historical Society and now a site supervisor for the North Dakota Historical Society, wrote, "This exceptional approach to combining already published material with hundreds of original images and maps from the archives and collections of the State Historical Society of North Dakota, and new graphics created for this volume make it a richly illustrated and compel-

ling read.... Historical organizations across the country will utilize this excellent model as an example of what they can aspire to."

The book has been a rousing success in North Dakota. According to Neil Howe, North Dakota Studies Coordinator for the NDCDE, as of fall 2009 the initial printing of 2,500 copies is nearly depleted with about 140 of the state's 220 high schools using the book. In 2008, the textbook received the Notable Document Award from the North Dakota Library Association, which has helped drive general public sales, as well as purchases by college and university libraries. NDCDE and the State Historical Society of North Dakota are considering a reprint in the future.

Michael Gilbertson, a teacher at Bismarck High School who was involved in development of the resources, summed up the book's impact well. The material "weaves a tale that actually happened in North Dakota. And that brings it alive for the kids."

Are Historical Society-Created Textbooks the Next Big Thing in History?

It is unclear whether this year's wave of school textbooks developed by state historical societies and their partner organizations signals a new trend in the field or if this will simply be a one-year phenomenon. Regardless, these four projects offer models for organizations across the country as they look for ways to encourage ongoing and meaningful engagement with their community in general and school districts specifically.

As schools and museums across the country struggle to adapt and respond to curriculum requirements spawned by No Child Left Behind, these four projects pro-

For more information on these award-winning projects, visit the following organizational websites.

Arizona – www.arizonahistoricalsociety.org

Montana – <http://mhs.mt.gov/education/textbook/textbookmainpage.asp>

North Dakota – www.history.nd.gov

Wisconsin – www.wisconsinhistory.org

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vide ample encouragement for all to look at museum and historical society collections as resources and, with teacher input and support, as a way to develop state-specific textbooks without utilizing the traditional methods employed by large textbook publishers. The approach utilized in each example ties the classroom much more closely to local and relevant examples while using the state's material culture and archival collections to tell and illustrate the states' histories. Ideally, having such great exposure in the classroom will also translate to increased school and family visitation at the featured institutions by groups wanting to see the collections highlighted in the books.

Developing textbooks and educational resources of these types is a great way to position a historical organization as unique, relevant, and engaging community resources. Throughout the textbook project, organizations can educate teachers on how to use their archival and collections materials as teaching tools centered within the context of the state standards they need to teach. In addition, many of these projects have generated increased public interest in state history and the organizations that care for the artifacts, archival materials, and sites featured in the publications.

Historical societies and museums know state and local history best. They have the materials within their collections, readily at hand, to present diverse and engaging history in the classroom. And they provide a refreshing alternative to the often cookie-cutter approach utilized by large textbook development companies. ●

Scott L. Wands is the Heritage Resource Center & Field Services Director for the Connecticut Humanities Council. He currently serves as an AASLH Regional Representative and is a member of the 2010 Annual Conference Program Committee. Scott can be reached at scott@ctculture.org.

Trina Nelson Thomas is Senior Director, Public Programs at the Indiana Historical Society. She currently serves as an AASLH Regional Representative, Leadership Development Committee member, Project Management for History Professionals advisory committee member, and is a planning partner for the Seminar for Historical Administration. Trina can be reached at tnelsonthomas@indianahistory.org.

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